

# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current NYC & LA Entertainment Scenes

## Future NYC Theatre Openings

Fifth Season- Cort 1/13/53. George Kondolf presents new play by Sylvia Regen. Richard Whorf and Menasha Skulnik star, Gregory Ratoff directed... Be Your Age-48th St Theatre 1/14/53. Alex Cohen, Joseph Kipness and Morris Bauer present new Reginald Denham and Mary Orr play, directed by Denham.

## Digests of Current NY Theatre Reviews

Two's Company-Alvin 12/15/52. Slight majority of weekly reviewers turned thumbs down on James Russo and Michael Ellis musical, with Variety, Newsweek and Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun filing mild pro notices. Lack of good sketch material and lack of ability of star Bette Davis chief complaints of the critics who voted against show. Time man thought star struggles valiantly, but a big time revue is too new to her, and comedy doesn't come natural. Some of the skits, he added, have promising ideas, but few are even reasonably funny. Gibbs, New Yorker, rated Hiram Sherman as the best in the show, while he found little merit in songs by Vernon Duke and Ogden Nash. Keating, Cue, agreed that fault lies with sketches which are neither fresh nor witty. While he considered Oliver Wakefield's sketch on British humor a lapse of taste. Billboard's pewsitter Francis gave Davis a big hand for courage, but reported her singing mediocre, her dancing rudimentary and her comedy timing sometimes almost amateurish. Expensive, earnest and utterly mediocre is how WCBS Bill Leonard rated it. Newsweek critic admitted that in spite of so much courage and determination the result is only mild entertainment. Number of talented people including Sherman, David Burns and Nora Kaye were praised, as was Ralph Alswang and Miles White sets and costumes. Hobe, Variety, was surprised to find the show turn out to be entertaining, with Davis having plenty of animation and vitality. He agreed with others who didn't rate movie star's stage talents too highly, but noted that production is shrewdly designed and skillfully produced to present her at maximum advantage. Though Morehouse, WT&S, fully expected to see a frantic and disorganized revue, he found instead a smooth running show that has considerable style, some humor and some pleasant performers.

The Children's Hour-Coronet 12/18/52. All but one of weekly reviewers who filed reports on Kermit Bloomgarden's revival of Lillian Hellman's 1934 hit rated it as exciting theatre and probably the best drama of the season. Keating, Cue, disagreed. It remains a strong, vital gripping drama, he noted, but current production leaves much to be desired. With exception of Patricia Neal, the rest of the cast fail to come across with the power they should have, he panned. Time critic found script still vivid and powerful after 18 years. Production, he feared, isn't of a whole because Kim Hunter and Neal display a lack of shading in their roles. Evening proves though how much a good play is able to do for itself. Newsweek man had no limitations, he rated production as far and away the finest drama of season. Hobe, Variety, found script has acquired a stimulating new quality of contemporary significance. Francis, Billboard, reminded that it is not for children, but it is great adult theatre all over again. Iris Mann highly applauded by all critics for her fine performance. While author's direction drew split notices, some branding it as too melodramatic.

## Hits Revisited

The Fourposter continues to provide an enjoyable, ingratiating evening at the Golden reports Sheaffer, Eagle. With Sylvia Sidney and Romney Brent as the new cast it remains a shrewd, theatre wise affair that knows how to keep an audience happy. Though present couple are not quite up to the personality appeal and acting authority of their predecessors, they are seasoned, resourceful players, he commented.

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' Children's Theatre '  
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Salzburg Marionette Theatre performances at Ziegfeld highly rated by "J.B." Times, who found them disconcertingly lifelike and capable of complex actions...Kitten Cat Theatre, 316 West 57th St, NYC, presenting The Christmas Cat...Princess in the Tower, dramatization of German fairy tale "Rapunzel" presented by Children's World Theatre at Barbizon Plaza...The Golden Goose presented at YMHA Kaufmann Auditorium...Circle in the Square presenting songs and dances for children by Donald McKayle and Pat Brooks...The Magician, presented by Jewish Theatre at Joan of Arc Playhouse...Hans Brinker of the Silver Skates presented by the Junior Theater at Carnegie Recital Hall...Holiday festival of Dance Plays produced at Henry St. Theatre...Most of these shows playing matinees during holiday vacation week.

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' Off Broadway '  
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Circle in the Square production of Summer and Smoke may play at Fairbanks, Alaska, Arts Festival for a week in Feb...Noone, new play by Gil Orlovitz, opens for short run at Provincetown Jan 7, under sponsorship of Louis Brigante...Light Opera Company presenting Offenbach's Madame Favart weekends at Provincetown... Ken Parker will present plays at Jan Hus House Theatre...Merry Go Round, musical fantasy on show business presented at Amato Theatre, is backed by 600 Columbia University students. Author is Ben Victor, manager of campus luncheonette. Two act revue presented Dec 30-Jan 4.

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' Vaudeville '  
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Artie Dann, TV comic, headlines current Palace show. Featured are Yvonne Moray, Gilbert & Russell, Chet Clark, Ross Wyse, Jr, the 3 Woodside Sisters, Else and Waldo and Cinse's Collies...Seats are on sale at Palace for Danny Kaye All Star International Variety Show, which opens Jan 18...Roxy's first show on its new, enlarged ice stage impressed Post, News, and Herald Tribune reviewers. Evelyn Chandler and Tony LeMac won plaudits. Herald Tribune man noted that onstage effects neared those obtained by Hollywood's more strident musicals.

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' Yiddish Theatre '  
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Uncle Sam in Israel, English production of Yiddish play presented by same cast at Public Theatre closed...Maxie Rosenbloom and Selma Kaye co-starred in Happy Go Lucky, new American Yiddish revue by Jack Saxon at Parkway Theatre, Brooklyn...Girl of My Dreams an American Yiddish musical comedy opens at Second Ave Theatre Dec 29 with Irving Jacobson and Edmund Zavenda...Folksbine, dramatic group of the Workmen's Circle, current production, Abraham Goldfaden's folk comedy with music Sambatjan, okayed by Rice, Post, and Wilken, News, as up to group's usual high standards in Yiddish theatre.

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' Green Room Department '  
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PASS BUILDING CODES...Herald Tribune editorial urges NY City Council to pass the proposed changes in the theatre building codes without delay. This is the first step toward putting fresh life into the NY theatre. Paper sees no sound reason for not getting ahead with the legislative job at once and inviting new capital into theatre building.

DRESSING FOR THEATRE...It's fun to dress up for the theatre, Burr, Playbill, reminds critics still angry at recent suggestion of Chapman, News, that reviewers should dress formally for their chores. Burr notes that few reviewers arrive actually looking like bums, as News critic charged, though in some instances you might perhaps suspect that they did their best and just didn't manage to make it...Melvyn Douglas, Time Out for Ginger, added on Du mont TV "Broadway Matinee" that the audience didn't have to dress formally to make their playgoing more of an experience.

ARTISTS INVITED...NY is a fortunate city to attract top talent from the four corners of the earth points out NY Times editorial. It is more than a case of wealth or intellectual snobbishness. Actors and actresses, dancers and singers, all feel appreciated as artists. More such groups as the Madeliene Renaud-Jean Louis Barrault Company and the National Theatre of Greece should come, the paper urged. What about the Comedie Francaise, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, and Amsterdam Concertgebouw?

COLUMN TIPS...Madeleine Carroll will definitely do a Broadway show early in 1953, informs Kilgallen...Most of columnists enjoyed Two's Company, while most of critics didn't, points out Sobol...Nancy Walker will leave Pal Joey soon for a visit from stork reveals Wilson...Runyon Fund has 6 good seats for every performance of Danny Kaye at the Palace, reminds Winchell.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...George Jean Nathan notes that he hates to see the theatre, particularly in a day when it is crying for medicine to restore its health, being fed the kind of drugs that not only further enfeeble it, but make it look contemptible. Delayed "con" verdict on See the Jaguar brought on this comment...Watts, Post, thinks ideas that unmarried drama critics may like or dislike certain kinds of plays should be dropped. Even if opinion was influenced it is the estimate of the writing and acting that counts.

THEATRE IDEAS...Equity should stage a number of benefit performances on Broadway to send stars into hinterlands to establish and guide new theatre groups, to stimulate new audiences for Equity companies, suggests Coleman, Mirror...Lee Shubert might be able to find shelter for ousted Twelfth Night Club, notes Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Tommy Brotherton, Playhouse treasurer who celebrated his 40th year in the box office, still wonders why the ticket buyer doesn't believe the man in the box office, even when he is telling the truth, Robinson, WT&S, learned...Richard Castle, Bernardine, still continues his duties as a taxi driver, Ross, Herald Tribune, reports. Bold yet careful is how Castle summed up the expert NYC cab driver's approach to pedestrians.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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The Millionairess closed its limited run... The Grey Eyed People closed after 5th performance...Whistler's Grandmother laid off Mon to Thur of Christmas week...The Four-poster resumed after week's suspension with Sylvia Sidney and Romney Brent...Actors' Fund appeal to theatre goers made this week...Gibbs, New Yorker, to take month off to work on new play with Burgess Meredith. McCarten to sub...One man version of Hamlet will be viewed in 15 minute segments on WABD, NYC, on "One Man's Experience" starting Jan 5...



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' LA Theatre Notes '

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Barter Theatre of Virginia presented its National Touring Company in Merchant of Venice at Royce Hall Auditorium on UCLA campus for 2 performances...Circle Theatre has agreed to change name of its coming production of Moulin Rouge, play based on Pierre La Mure's novel, to Montmartre. Reason is possible confusion with motion picture of same name. Play stars Constance Dowling and Gene Reynolds...Point of No Return with Henry Fonda will end its nationwide tour in Los Angeles in June...Finian's Rainbow, produced by Drama Department of Los Angeles City College, was a smooth, professional production, praises Von Blon, Times...LA drama editors and reporters were flown to NY for opening of Hal Wallis' film "Come Back, Little Sheba."

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' Peter Ustinov on Playwriting '

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Writing of a well-made play can be learned, Peter Ustinov, author of The Love of Four Colonels told a recent meeting of the Royal Society of Arts, Amateur Stage reports. This knowledge, he continued, can even be taught. But the writing of a fine play can neither be learned nor taught.

A man's strategy must be his own, he explained. His technique must be personal and acquired by his own observation colored by his talents. The only rule, apart from an interval or tow, and it is a difficult one, is to maintain the interest of the audience. The playwright must never allow a moment of indifference in his heares if he can help it.

The weapons of the playwright, he pointed out, are a liberal use of surprise, tempered of course, by his sense of what is possible, by his feeling for his own characters. He must not be afraid to be different, or to speak his own mind. A large proportion of those plays which fail do so, Ustinov believes, because they stick faithfully to certain ill-digested dogmas and finally because the dogmas drown all personality. The writer must not be afraid of showing his hand, especially in an age where too much is praised for its very unpretentiousness, for actually being a humble job well done.

A play is not just craftsmanship, it is a translation of life into personal terms. The photography of existence is not enough, he stated. In dramatic technique there are 100 right ways and 1000 wrong ways. The playwright must know how and when to disguise his construction. Nowadays, he concluded, there is a chaos of convention, which is a kaleidoscope of the times. Farce had rules once, but it has spilled over into comedy and even reality.

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